

Fred Branfman

INDOCHINA: THE ILLUSION OF WITHDRAWAL

Behind the celebrations of progress, a policy of covert war

THERE HAS BEEN AN almost audible sigh of public relief since the signing of "The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam." True, everyone knows full disengagement will be a slow and complicated business, stretching through months and months. But the important thing seems to be that the United States has agreed to (1) a set of principles sweeping away the familiar justification for U.S. war in Indochina; (2) a set of promises built around the stipulation that the U.S. "will not continue its military involvement or intervene in the internal affairs of South Vietnam." At the very least, we accept the idea that the Paris agreement marks progress; from there, we may be inclined to assume that Vietnam will begin receding into a limbo where American involvement is nonexistent.

The evidence paints a contradictory picture. It shows, instead, that we are "progressing back" to the kind of covert warfare practiced in Vietnam during the late Fifties and early Sixties, and in Laos almost continuously since 1962. In the months since the Paris agreement was signed, there has been a steadily growing record of press reports, public statements by Administration officials, and budget allocations that, taken together, point to resumption of a covert war, leaving us poised only half a step away from a renewed major military commitment in Indochina. No piece of evidence is conclusive in itself, but the overall pattern is distinct. Here's the way I see the logic of the situation, based on newspaper reports, Congressional testimony, official documents, and my own four years' experience watching the "secret war" in Laos.

First, President Nixon apparently has no intention of abandoning President Thieu, nor even of adopting a more neutral U.S. role in Vietnam. According to the Paris agreement, "two parties" are to exercise joint sovereignty over South Vietnam: the present government under Thieu, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), formerly known as the Vietcong. Yet no sooner was the agreement signed than Nixon identified the Thieu regime as "the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam." He then dramatized his statement by dispatching Vice President Agnew to Saigon.

Second, given such unstinting American support, Thieu has no incentive at all to share power with the PRG. To the contrary, since the Thieu regime commands (with American help) an enormous military establishment, there is every reason to believe he will attempt to consolidate his power through military and paramilitary means. Which is what appears to be happening. After the agreement was signed, Thieu declared he would "arrest or shoot on the spot" anyone openly identifying with or working for the PRG. A death sentence was decreed for anyone inciting "pro-Communist" demonstrations or circulating PRG money, and immediate arrest for anyone distributing PRG flags and leaflets or participating in public political activities by "pro-Communist or neutralist elements." On January 26 a correspondent for the *Washington Star-News* reported that "in one province of the Mekong Delta, local officials are being told to shoot on sight anyone suspected of being a member of the NLF, and to hide the body. There seem to be other orders of a similar nature."

Under these conditions, even if a cease-fire takes hold, its maintenance will be extremely fragile; it will exist only so long as the Thieu regime and its American advisers believe the PRG can be contained by covert means.

The enormous commitment the Nixon Administration has made to Thieu's continuation in power is best measured in dollars. For fiscal year 1973 Nixon proposed an aid package that would have provided the Thieu regime with \$3.4 billion—an increase of \$675 million over FY 1972.* However, Congress refused to pass the Administration's bill and voted instead to fund foreign aid through a continuing appropriations resolution to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1972. Congress thus limited FY 1973 spending to the levels authorized for FY 1972.

* This increase in aid can also be understood as almost equal to the expected FY 1973 savings from cuts in the budget of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for Medicare (\$342 million), Medicaid (\$101 million), mental health programs (\$18 million), health program grants (\$16 million), university community services (\$9 million), library programs (\$2 million), vocational rehabilitation programs (\$6 million), social services research and training (\$10 million), and welfare (\$129 million).

Fred Branfman is co-director of the Indochina Resource Center in Washington, D.C. and author of Voices from the Plain of Jars, a chronicle of life under an air war. From 1967 to 1971 he was in Laos with the International Voluntary Service and as a free-lance journalist.

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For next year, FY 1974, the Administration is proposing to give Thieu \$1.6 billion in military aid and to spend another \$1 billion to maintain U.S. forces in Thailand.* This FY 1974 proposal is still considered a preliminary estimate, and Defense Department comptroller Robert Moot stated on January 29 that "it's still too early for us to determine what modification will be required in the budget, but we will be determining it and we will be advising the Congress . . ."

This aid is responsible for Thieu's remaining in power. The military portion provides all his bombs, planes, guns, and ammunition. The economic aid is even more essential. Henry Bradsher reported in the *Washington Star-News* on January 30, for example, that "American support for the South Vietnamese economy is running down. Government officials are feeling a pinch in funds available for imports, and as a result they fear instability as supplies dwindle. The challenge is to survive until the promised new program begins." Government officials have admitted that the U.S. supplies well over half of Thieu's budget, and one Vietnam specialist shows that U.S. funds have supplied over 90 percent in the past four years.**

In addition to these massive aid programs, the U.S. will be providing Thieu with between 5,000 and 10,000 American advisers.† A major portion of these advisers, as confirmed by Congressional testimony and by newspaper ads placed by U.S. corporations, will be committed to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). Newspaper reports indicate that Americans will also be advising the South Vietnamese Army, police, and pacification programs.

It is clear that both the dollar aid and the commitment of American personnel have little to do with "reconstructing" Vietnam, though that is occasionally trotted out as a justification. Not only is the military aid 80 percent of the total but the vast majority of the advisers will be performing military and paramilitary tasks.

* This \$2.6 billion is roughly equal to the savings expected to result in FY 1974 from the termination of the Office of Economic Opportunity (\$328 million); reduction in child feeding programs (\$59 million); phasing out of the Economic Development Administration (\$35 million); elimination of soil and water programs (\$258 million); termination of rural water systems and waste disposal grants (\$100 million); suspension of new housing programs (\$305 million); phasing down of the Emergency Employment Assistance program (\$670 million); and cutbacks in Old Age Survivors and Disability Insurance (\$310 million), manpower training programs (\$354 million), federal student loans (\$264 million), and student subsidies (\$119 million).

** See "A Welfare State Through War and Peace," by Guy Gran, available from the Indochina Resource Center, 1322 18th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

† See the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reports of February 9, 1973.

The Paris agreement represents an adjustment of our military posture in Vietnam, not an abandonment of it. So it appears that the Administration is preparing for a period of covert war to assure a pro-American South Vietnamese government. The following evidence supports the thesis.

Personnel for a covert war

SINCE APRIL 1, when U.S. forces were formally withdrawn, American personnel in Vietnam have done essentially what the soldiers did before them. They are under contract to the Department of Defense, the State Department, or the Central Intelligence Agency, performing chiefly military and paramilitary tasks.

Many advisers to the South Vietnamese Air Force and Army are technically civilians, it is true. But almost all have been members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and many were recruited directly from the U.S. Air Force or Army.

There have also been indications that some active-duty U.S. military personnel remain in South Vietnam disguised as civilians. A November 29 *Los Angeles Times* dispatch from Saigon, for example, noted:

While many of the new experts or technicians (or advisers) will be wearing civilian sportshirts, the suspicion is strong that underneath they will have dogtags, or at least retirement papers . . . One staff officer, already sporting civilian clothes much of the time, admits that the biggest change in his office will be the removal of some awards and military knickknacks, including a mounted AK-47 rifle, which would not fit his "new" identity.

It is also quite possible that active-duty military personnel will be sent into South Vietnam on "temporary duty" from Thailand. One indication of this is the announcement that the U.S. military command will move from Saigon to the remote Air Force base at Nakhorn Phanom (NKP) in northeast Thailand. NKP is smaller and has fewer facilities than other U.S. bases in Thailand, such as Udorn or U-Tapao. It has, however, served as a center for U.S. covert activities for years. NKP functioned as a base for the abortive electronic battlefield, for the "Blue Berets" of the Air Force Special Forces, and for the 56th Special Operations Wing, a prop-plane unit used for agent insertion, pilot rescue, and specialized operations like the Son Tay prison raid. Were the U.S. role from Thailand to be limited to logistics support for South Vietnam, it is unlikely that NKP would have been chosen as the new U.S. command post.

Clearly the U.S. withdrawal has been such that it does not compromise the capacity to direct and participate in covert war operations.

The news climate for a covert war

A MAJOR FACTOR IN KEEPING continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam hidden will be reduced press coverage. The normal shrinkage of news bureau staffs and coverage—such as *Newsweek's* cancellation of its special section on Indochina news—is well under way. Furthermore, as Vietnam declines as a source of news, the most talented and imaginative journalists will no longer be posted there. During the mid-Sixties, for example, the bureau chiefs for one major newsmagazine tended to be French-speaking journalists who relied heavily on nonofficial sources for their information. Now, however, this magazine has appointed as bureau chief its long-time chief Pentagon correspondent, a man of fifty who relies primarily on U.S. military personnel for information.

The sources of information open to foreign journalists covering Vietnam have also declined as many volunteer organizations have shut down operations. International Voluntary Services at its peak, for example, had over 200 Vietnamese-speaking Americans working in Vietnam. Its director, Don Luce, was widely regarded as one of the few Americans who really understood Vietnam; he supplied a great deal of information to journalists and himself came up with one of the most publicized stories from Vietnam, on the existence of the "tiger cage" prison cells. IVS no longer operates in Vietnam.

More serious than these factors is the clear pattern of press intimidation and censorship concerning U.S. activities. Over recent months a growing number of U.S. journalists have been denied entry to Vietnam: Gloria Emerson and Malcolm Browne of the *New York Times*, Judy Coburn of *The Village Voice*. Others have been expelled: Mike Morrow of *Dispatch*, Don Luce, NBC's Ron Nessen, and UPI's bureau chief Donald Davis. All signs point to more expulsions and more harassment of correspondents, meaning less news from South Vietnam—unless, of course, it is government approved.

Reporters still in Vietnam have repeatedly been denied access to events. On February 7, for example, CBS cameraman Foster Davis was prevented by Thieu's police from entering Binh Phu village after it had been bombed and attacked by South Vietnamese troops. Other newsmen have had the tires of their jeeps shot out for attempting to observe ARVN fighting during the cease-fire and have been detained for trying to visit PRG and North Vietnamese delegates to the Joint Military Commission.

Newsmen have been warned that "un-Vietnamese" reporting could lead to their expulsion, and Vietnamese interpreters and assistants have been threatened with arrest. Saigon authorities warned newsmen on February 17 that they could be shot for attempting to interview PRG and North Vietnamese delegates in Saigon. On March 3, according to a report in the *New York Times*, the South Vietnamese government reiterated its

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intention "to deal severely with foreign journalists who deliberately violate our rules and regulations and carry out un-Vietnamese activities."

The political apparatus for covert war

THIEU'S OPENLY ANNOUNCED ORDERS to "arrest or shoot on sight" persons involved in a wide variety of "pro-Communist or neutralist" activities indicate his willingness to take stringent measures to eradicate his political opposition. By using the prison system, assassination programs, and the huge national police network, Thieu can wage a widespread covert war by political means. For such an effort he will be able to rely on American aid and American personnel coordinated primarily through the new "Resettlement and Reconstruction Directorate" of the U.S. Embassy. As Peter Osnos reported in the *Washington Post* on February 9:

Virtually all of the senior civilians in CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support), the acronym for the pacification effort under the U.S. Military Assistance Command, are being kept on. George D. Jacobson, a retired colonel who has been the operational head of CORDS for almost two years, has been named a special assistant to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker.

The structure of the R and R directorate will be very similar to the civilian side of the old pacification program.

The prison system

Estimates of the number of political prisoners held by the Thieu regime range from a *New York Times* figure of 70,000 to Don Luce's figure of 200,000 to the PRG's figure of 300,000. Despite the token release of between 5,000 and 10,000 prisoners, Thieu is unlikely to release the majority of the prisoners since they include not only members of the PRG but even more importantly the bulk of his "third-force" opposition. Indeed, there have been reports of increasing arrests in recent months.

There have also been charges that the Thieu regime has begun to execute its political prisoners. On January 26, Amnesty International, the organization that keeps track of political prisoners in Communist and non-Communist countries alike, issued a statement that declared, in part:

There is a real danger that key members of the South Vietnamese non-Communist opposition who are detained will be killed . . . As recently as December 26, 267 political prisoners, among them 18 student leaders, were sent from Chi Hoa National Prison in Saigon to the notorious prison on Con Son Island, home of the "tiger cage" detention cells. On December 10, a large number of female prisoners were taken away by truck

from Tan Hiep and Thu Duc National Prisons near Saigon and have not been heard of since. Some 300 prisoners traveling on a boat from Con Son to the mainland are reported to have been killed . . .

Thieu's use of the prison system as a political tool depends substantially on American aid. American personnel have been heavily involved with the prison system for years, although this has often been denied. When a group of visiting U.S. Congressmen exposed the tiger cages in June 1970, AID "Public Safety" director Frank Walton publicly denied any knowledge of them. Don Luce subsequently revealed a memo written by Walton on October 1, 1963. In it, Walton stated:

In Con Son II, some of the hardcore communists keep preaching the "party" line, so these "Reds" are sent to the tiger cages in Con Son I where they are isolated from all others for months at a time. This confinement . . . may include immobilization—the prisoner is bolted to the floor, handcuffed to a bar or rod, or legirons with the chain through an eyebolt, or around a bar or rod.

Luce has also revealed a Navy Department memo dated January 7, 1971, six months after the Nixon Administration announced that the tiger cages had been abolished. The memo indicates that the U.S. construction company RMK was contracted to build new "Isolation Compounds" at Con Son.

U.S. involvement in the prison system continues. AID's "Project Budget Submission—FY 1974," dated June 1972, shows that the U.S. continues to build new prisons, provide funds for expanded prison personnel, and provide training for new and old prison staff members. Interestingly, although newsmen and Congressmen have been unable to obtain information about specific prisoners or their overall number, this report states that "a program has been established at all correction centers to register and identify all prison inmates."

Assassination programs

Thieu's order to "shoot on sight" individuals aiding the PRG indicates that assassination programs will continue in the post-cease-fire period.

A non-Communist Catholic Deputy to the Saigon National Assembly, Ho Ngoc Nhuan, wrote in an article dated January 18, 1973:

The U.S. is putting an additional tool in the hands of the powerful South Vietnamese police. A new program, with only the name of F-6, is being secretly installed to replace the (U.S.) CIA-organized Phoenix program, discontinued recently. Like its predecessor, the new program is aimed at "neutralizing" suspected Vietcong cadre and sympathizers.

The Phoenix program itself has already claimed more than 40,000 lives. A Saigon Min-

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istry of Information document entitled "Vietnam: Toward Peace and Prosperity" states that 40,994 people were killed under Phoenix between mid-1968 and mid-1971 alone. National Study Security Memorandum #1, the "Kissinger Papers," reveals that the United States has been the main force behind Thieu's assassination program. The State Department is on record confirming Phoenix as an instrument of American policy; a report notes that Phoenix "has also served notice to the Province Chiefs that their performance will in large part be measured by Phoenix results. Although the program was launched in December 1967, Saigon-level Vietnamese cooperation was minimal until Thieu, after considerable American prodding, issued a presidential decree in July 1968 formally directing that the network be set up."

Former Phoenix agent Barton Osborne has testified before Congress that the CIA both funded and directed the Phoenix program, under the guise of State Department "Combined Studies" offices throughout South Vietnam. He has revealed that assassination teams worked under the direct supervision of U.S. personnel.

The police system

There are eleven separate police units in South Vietnam, composed of over 120,000 men. Reports from Vietnam indicate that their activities have been greatly increased in recent weeks in line with Thieu's orders for a crackdown. On January 18 Craig Whitney of the *New York Times* visited the village of Trung Lap, thirty miles north of Saigon. Bui Van Hai, a hamlet chief, told him, "It's a hard place to live in. There are four or five people arrested every day. Yesterday more than ten."

The district chief, Maj. Le Xuan Son, was quoted as saying:

"Cease-fire or no cease-fire, this is a government district, and I will show that the national laws are still in force. We have a list of the people who are Communist suspects or suspected Communist sympathizers, and if they start causing trouble after a cease-fire, they will be arrested. We have detailed plans for that. If the Communists show up in the village, we will neutralize them. If they resist arrest, they will be killed."

Whitney went on to report that the Major's "plans for a cease-fire are matched in every hamlet, village and district in the country."

That the United States is heavily involved in nearly every branch of the national police is made crystal clear by the AID FY 1974 project budget submission. Moreover, that report states that the U.S. has "obligations" for national police support and public safety telecommunications until June 1978. Some of these "obligations" are to:

"Complete initial registration of Vietnamese

15 years of age and older by the close of FY 71."

"By mid FY 72, increase issuance of Identification (ID) Cards from 5.5 million to 11.5 million."

"Establish by the end of FY 75 a central records system containing 12 million individual bio-data documents and 11.5 million dossiers."

"Continue operational activity against VCI in areas where responsibility for security is assigned to National Police in FY 72 and FY 73."

"Increase National Police inspections during FY 72 and FY 73 to ensure that US/GVN policies are implemented down to the lowest level to help identify and counter activities of subversive organizational cadre."

Develop "a systems analysis and computer programming capability. This is scheduled by mid FY 72, as an indigenous police data management organization for collecting, preparing, and editing data for electronic data processing and providing systems analysis and computer programming services for the National Police Command."

It is clear from this by no means exhaustive list that the United States does far more than simply "advise" the Vietnamese police system. Thieu's national police system, as presently constituted, is a creation of the United States and could not function without U.S. direction and funding.

The U.S. is prohibited from continuing this police support by the peace agreement. Article 5 states specifically that "advisers from the above-mentioned countries to all para-military organizations and the police force will also be withdrawn within the same period of time [sixty days]."

There are signs, however, that this provision may not be complied with. Peter Osnos reported in the *Washington Post* on February 9 that "one important change in the present set-up, in keeping with the requirements of the Paris cease-fire agreement, is that all civilian public safety advisers who worked with the South Vietnamese police have been withdrawn. (It has been quietly decided, however, to leave a handful of police experts in Saigon, U.S. sources said.)"

The military apparatus for covert war

SHOULD THESE POLITICAL MEANS of controlling the opposition prove insufficient, or more direct military activities be called for, the Nixon Administration will have several means at its disposal for mounting covert military operations.

Covert U.S. military involvement will be directed by the Pentagon and the CIA. The main center for Pentagon activities in South Vietnam

will be the U.S. military attaché's office. Although formally limited to a few dozen personnel, experience indicates that the attaché's office may include a top-secret section of military men disguised as civilians that could run into the hundreds. In Laos, for example, the official attaché complement was supplemented by the highly classified Project 404—a body of dozens of U.S. Army and Air Force personnel.

The military attaché's office will also coordinate the activities of the thousands of civilian technicians on Defense Department contracts assigned to the Vietnamese Army and Air Force. And, finally, the attaché unit will direct U.S. soldiers coming into South Vietnam on temporary duty from Thailand.

The CIA will maintain an entirely separate operation, if history is any precedent. Most of its work will be done with "Secret Army" forces. As in Laos, however, the CIA may retain control over most of Air America, U.S. Special Forces, and other military personnel seconded to it, and many of the operations of the 56th Special Operations Wing, based at Nakhorn Phanom. The CIA may also retain its own photo recon unit.

There are three separate military capabilities that can be orchestrated to carry out covert operations.

The "Secret Army"

The CIA has built up an irregular force commonly estimated at about 30,000 montagnards and ethnic Cambodians in South Vietnam. This force is led by American officers, mostly Special Forces, under the control of the CIA. Its chain of command, logistic belt, and operations are entirely separate from the ARVN.

This force is known most widely within South Vietnam as "CIDGES," for Civilian Irregular Defense Group. It might more properly be called the "Secret Army," however, since it is part of a 100,000-man army stretching throughout Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and South Vietnam that recognizes no sovereign governments or national frontiers and is responsible only to its CIA employers.

The South Vietnam branch of the "Secret Army" has been used until now primarily for such classified missions as cross-border operations into Laos and Cambodia, assassination, espionage, and sabotage throughout Indochina, including North Vietnam. The withdrawal of U.S. ground forces, however, may result in an expansion of the "Secret Army" in South Vietnam. For one thing, CIA control of this irregular force ensures that U.S. military activities can be better hidden than can Pentagon involvement with the ARVN. For another, the coming period may see the further deterioration of the ARVN as a viable fighting force. Morale is already low, and the future may bring increased

desertion and even greater corruption among top ARVN officers, as wartime pressures decrease.

Air America will play a key role in any such expansion of the "Secret Army," as it has in Laos. The *New York Times* reported on February 9 that "the airline [Air America] is expected to enlarge its operations in South Vietnam as the last American military planes leave." One of its key jobs will be supplying irregular army outposts with arms, ammunition, and matériel, ferrying its U.S., Thai, and Korean officers about, deploying troops, and spotting for South Vietnamese bombers.

One possible indication of future U.S. involvement with the "Secret Army" is the *Periscope* item in the January 15 *Newsweek* noting that Green Berets are being sent to Indochina, ostensibly to search for U.S. military still listed as missing in action.

The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF)

The VNAF is already the fourth largest in the world, with more than 2,000 aircraft. It remains, of course, an American creation. The U.S. supplies the aircraft, ordnance, fuel, photo intelligence, communications, and spare parts without which it could not be kept aloft.

The Administration has already announced that U.S. logistics support will continue into the post-cease-fire period. But logistics support alone will not suffice to keep the VNAF flying. The sophisticated requirements of a modern air force like the VNAF demand personnel far more qualified than those presently available.

A Government Accounting Office report entitled "Logistic Aspects of Vietnamization, 1969-72," completed in November 1972, stated that Saigon was unable to handle its U.S.-supplied equipment. A *Washington Post* story on the report, dated February 19, noted:

The GAO, Congress' watchdog agency, suggests that with \$5 billion in U.S. equipment, President Thieu's regime has more matériel than it can properly manage alone—by U.S. standards. "It is clear that the South Vietnamese will continue to require some foreign aid," the GAO investigators found, citing in particular a continued need for foreign (civilian) technicians to help maintain complex helicopters, the new four-engine C-130 transports, communications gear and tanks . . .

No "viable" preventive maintenance effort, due to command neglect, exists even in training. GAO investigators looking at grease joints at a truck depot found them "bone dry." One unit had 20 percent of its tanks deadlined for lack of such simple maintenance.

Technicians, managers, and even trained clerks are in short supply, given the overall task of keeping up a U.S.-style war machine and logistics suffer as a result.

"The President has already begun preparing the American public for the possible resumption of U.S. war in Indochina."

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Ads in newspapers all over the U.S. give some idea of the wide range of jobs U.S. personnel are needed to perform. Lear-Siegler has advertised in newspapers like the *Washington Post* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* for U.S. personnel to work as electronic technicians, aircraft ground equipment technicians, jet engine mechanics, helicopter mechanics, maintenance chiefs, jet engine supervisors, management personnel, and industrial engineers. ITT's Federal Electric Corporation wants teletype operators, microwave technicians, switchboard operators, document controllers, digital computer technicians, crypto machine technicians. Northrop is looking for radar technicians, electronic countermeasure technicians, and fighter pilot instructors. And NHA seeks general civilian engineers, helicopter pilots, fixed-wing pilots, transportation economists, and airport, highway, maritime, hydraulic, railroad, and ship port engineers.

Past experience indicates, however, that U.S. Air Force help to the VNAF cannot be limited simply to contracting out such "civilian technical" positions. The VNAF also relies upon the U.S. Air Force personnel—for tasks such as photo reconnaissance, communication assistance, complex ordnance tasks, and assistance in target selection.

A comparison with Laos is instructive here. U.S. Air Force active-duty personnel have regularly assisted the Royal Laotian Air Force. Some of these men were stationed in Laos permanently. Many more would be sent into Laos from Thailand for periods ranging from several days to several months. All such personnel would wear civilian clothing while in Laos; they were instructed to identify themselves, if asked, as working for AID. The same sort of secret war that was conducted in Laos could be extended to Vietnam itself.*

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam

The million-man ARVN is also an American creation. Direct U.S. participation, from providing all logistics to planning strategy, will be necessary to keep it fighting. Logistics will presumably be directed by Maj. Gen. John E. Murray. Formerly MACV director of logistics, Murray has recently been appointed head of the Defense Attaché section of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

There are already indications, however, that the ARVN will need far more than simple logistics support. For example, the Knight newspapers' Pentagon correspondent, James McCartney, reported on November 17, 1972:

There have been reports that the U.S. is already far along on a program to provide the Saigon government with a kind of "brain

* See "How We Ran the Secret Air War in Laos," by Seymour Hersh, *New York Times Magazine*, October 29, 1972.

trust" of young West Point graduates for top-level military advice. The group would act as an official joint chiefs of staff to the Saigon government if these reports are correct.

As with the Vietnamese Air Force, ARVN function is almost entirely dependent on U.S. participation. Or, conversely, an arm of U.S. policy.

From covert to open war

THE PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY BEGUN preparing the American public for the possible resumption of U.S. war in Indochina. At the 21st National Prayer Breakfast on February 1, he warned that "we could read too much into the peace that we have talked about, much as we would hope that it could mean everything that we could possibly imagine . . . it will mean peace only to the extent that both sides and the leaders of both sides have the will to keep the agreement." There is ample evidence that President Nixon's will to keep the agreement will exist only so long as a pro-American regime sits unthreatened in Saigon. *New York Times* Pentagon correspondent William Beecher reported on January 23:

Administration officials, in the Pentagon and other departments, said Henry Kissinger had made it clear during his negotiations with North Vietnamese representatives in Paris that President Nixon would not hesitate to reapply air and sea power in Indochina if Hanoi should violate any cease-fire agreement in a blatant way.

President Nixon appeared to underline the tough American stance at a March 15 press conference at the White House when he declared:

I can only suggest this: that we have informed the North Vietnamese of our concern about this infiltration and that we believe it to be a violation of the cease-fire, the cease-fire and the peace agreement. Our concern has also been expressed to other interested parties, and I would only suggest that based on my actions over the past four years, the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expressions of concern, when they are made, with regard to a violation. That is all I will say.

Such reports do not, of course, inevitably mean that President Nixon will order resumption of the bombing in Indochina. But they make it clear that the war is far from over and that the U.S. is making an enormous commitment to the continuation of the Thieu regime. With that basic circumstance unchanged, and with a continuing covert war in the making, the resumption of widespread bombing remains only a short step away. □